DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 022 782 TE 500 092

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THE CONCORDIA FRESHMAN ENGLISH PROGRAM.

Minnesota Council of Teachers of English, Duluth.
Pub Date Apr 66
Note-7p.
Journal Cit-Minnesota English Journal; v1 n1 p14-20 Apr 1966
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.36
Descriptors-*COLLEGE FRESHMEN, ENGLISH, *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, ENGLISH PROGRAMS, *EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMS, EXPERIMENTAL TEACHING, HIGHER EDUCATION, *LEAD LECTURE PLAN, LECTURE, PROGRAM EVALUATION, TEACHER RESPONSIBILITY, TELEVISED INSTRUCTION, *TELEVISION TEACHERS
Identifiers-Concordia College, Minnesota

The remedies frequently adopted to solve the problems of staffing and administering an effective freshman English program have not been considered feasible or in the student's best interest at Concordia College. Recognizing the need for small classes as well as the problems and expenses of increased enrollments, the solution attempted at Concordia College consists of dividing the students into several large lecture sections and smaller discussion classes. The students attend televised lectures part of the time and work with their individual teachers the rest of the time. The results of this experiment are still tentative, but the advantages seem to outweigh the disadvantages. (BN)

Minnesota English Journal
Volume 1 Number 1
April 1966

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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The Concordia Freshman English Program

The problems of staffing and administering an effective freshman English program usually are of interest only to those directly involved; their consequences, however, should be the concern at least of everyone in the profession of teaching English. It is common knowledge that the freshman course, whatever its content or disguise, is not the most popular assignment the English department gives to its teachers. And there appears to be some justification for this. Many solutions have been attempted, and it seems as if at least some of these stem from a feeling that freshman English is not really respectable. In recent years particularly, when the ABD became an officially recognized "degree" and the role of the administrator changed from that of interviewer to interviewee, these solutions have revealed ingenuity but perhaps not sufficient willingness to begin with changing the conditions under which freshman English is taught. It may be interesting, and is certainly harmless, briefly to speculate on some of these remedies.

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One approach has been simply to ignore the subject by letting each individual teacher arrange the course content to suit himself On the assumption perhaps that this is a good example of academic freedom, and that it develops faculty initiative, it has often enough become an academic mess since the only thing anyone could be certain of was the number of credits on the student's transcript. It seems that unless there is at least agreement on the content (difficulty) of the course, this democratic principle has little chance of success,particularly in large departments where many (and often inexperienced) instructors are involved.

The solution that universities have by and large been compelled to accept is beyond the scope of this paper, really: it is obvious that the granting of assistantships is often the only means of achieving two important purposes. It is necessary to offer

financial assistance to graduate students, and it is necessary to have an inexpensive part-time instructional staff to cope with the large freshman class. That these two purposes are not equivalent to each other, and that therefore they do not of necessity require a single solution, seems apparent.

Another method has been the non-renewable teaching contract. The brand new full-time instructor gets some valuable experience, and even more valuable recommendations; the institution does not have to worry about his ever becoming an important factor in the salary budget. It is true that a graduate student must get his experience somewhere, and that his next institution will benefit from his having gained that experience at, usually a large and well-known university. But this approach also leads to some confusion of the issue, since it is primarily dictated by financial requirements and again leaves the freshman student to only secondary consideration.

A more subtle approach consists essentially of the introduction of new courses especially for the new teacher: the chance to "teach something in one's field of specialization" is very attractive, and the additional course won't attract too many students anyway. After all, nobody wants to have a teaching load of only freshman English. This method has sometimes been most ruthlessly employed by some of the colleges which have grown in the last few years from very small to respectably large. One wonders, though, why accrediting agencies don't concern themselves more actively with the problem of whether the college also has the necessary library facilities to permit those new courses to be taught.

There is always the attractive proposal that one hire somebody to read the students' papers. It seems, however, as if that method only aggravates one erroneous student assumption: in English we learn something, and we also write papers. It is amazing to see sometimes even in our professional literature an expression of wonder that the part-time paper reader can do a good job. Of course he can; he has the time for it. But that is still not the real point, how one can teach freshman English under decent conditions and read one's own papers for the simple reason that they are about the best

evidence that the student is learning something. We know that writing is only in part a skill to be learned, and that good writing is distinguished from bad more by the writer's understanding of his subject matter than by his mastery of basic skills.

In the meantime the freshman English sections grow larger, and the freshman student receives less and less attention. It is unfortunately true, even in Minnesota, that there are classes of 30 and more students. Assuming that the teaching load comes close to 12 semester hours, the result unfortunately doesn't require much imagination. Even our recent revisions of certification requirements in English imply that the freshman course is of relatively little significance, but build dream empires of concentration into the second half of the future teacher's academic training.

The solution being tried at Concordia College (Moorehead)began 4-5 years ago with several assumptions:

1. It seemed to us that as a department we should all of us be involved in and responsible for the content of our introductory course. Obviously no supervisor visits a teacher's classroom, but at the same time all of us do regularly agree on exactly what is to be required of the student, how much he is to read and to write. More important, we try to agree on the relationship between the two.
2. We teach at a college not in the business of giving graduate work, and do not believe that assistantships are justifiable for our purposes.
3. It seemed to us that hiring instructors on a non-renewable contract, keeping them until they were housebroken (and too expensive), was probably no favor to the new teacher, and certainly none to the student.
4. Certainly it seemed to be unjustifiable to continue to introduce courses in order to make our contract offers more attractive. It doen't follow at all that a new course offers the student something that he wouldn't obtain more successfully if the ones already in the catalog were taught under better conditions (such as adequate library facilities).

5. The freshman course is the single most important course taught in the department. Any other assumption suggests either that it is a "service" course to clean up the student's grammar (or some such foolishness), or that its being required of all students in the college is a dead tradition that it is time to change. (One could be cynical about the whole business and ask where else one can steal his best English majors.)
6. Freshman English takes time: student papers, when read perfunctorily, might as well not have been assigned. But the teacher is entitled to having this factor count heavily in the assignment of teaching loads.
7. Because of the increase in enrollments everywhere, the problems of administering a relatively "inexpensive" course become more acute. Only very few colleges have the necessary endowment to maintain adequate faculty salaries unless economies are introduced, but not at the expense of the student. Simply to reduce teaching loads or class sizes is just not possible.

We began with the assumption that while small class size was desirable, for many reasons, still there existed a certain amount of material in our course that could be most efficiently taught by lecture rather than discussion. The latter is valuable and necessary, but not every class period. If one is willing to admit that he does in fact lecture in many class periods, then it should also be apparent that it is unnecessary and wasteful, to conduct similar lectures in every class. Provided the classroom facilities are equivalent (and provided the teacher makes the necessary adjustments in presentation), there is little difference between lecturing to 30 or to 300 students, except to the college treasurer.

Thus we divided the students into several lecture sections; they attended these for certain class periods during the semester, and their teachers could devote themselves to other tasks. Several problems, however, became quickly apparent. It was difficult, particularly at first, to establish communication between the lecturer and and classroom teacher. The latter was tempted to believe himself relegated to an inferior position. The student became confused in, or even aware of, "loyalties," and sometimes his work reflected this. There were unpleasant and unnecessary differences of opinion ("but that's not what we were taught in lecture"). Also, all too often, students felt that no particular advance preparation was necessary for the lectures. Finally, enrollments increased while the auditorium did not: we had two, then three, finally the possibility of four different lecture sections. It would have been necessary to hire an additional lecturer in 1965, and a third one in 1967.

Our current experiment attempts to be cognizant of these difficulties. We cannot call it more than an experiment since we are in the midst of it; from the evidence that we (and our college psychologists) have been able to gather so far, however, it appears to be sufficiently successful to justify continuation. We were fortunate in two respects: Two years ago a first-rate educational television started in Fargo-Moorhead, and we were given active and generous support by the Louise W. and Maude Hill Family Foundation. But as we began recording lectures on video tape for later broadcast, we also made two modifications in the course itself.

First, it was decided that the lecturer teach specific assignments, and that he see them through. He may have the students for periods of up to three weeks at a time; he prepares his own quizzes and examinations, he demands his own written assignments. And he reads his own papers. Secondly, the lecturer has the students for the equivalent of half a semester. (As implied above, the times when the students have lectures are not

regularly scheduled, but dictated by the requirements of the syllabus, so that the lecturer has them sometimes for one class period, sometimes for many periods in succession.) The lecturer is responsible for a specific percentage of the student's final grade, as he teaches 19 or 20 times out of the total of 39 class periods.

What are the results? Anything said here must be considered as very tentative, because this latest attempt of ours to improve both the teaching standards and the learning situation is but seven months old. However, we find some encouraging evidence so far.

The student is evaluated twice, by two different people. Since the lecturer reads his own papers and prepares his own examinations, the student is exposed to two different opinions of his own work. This is valuable to him; occasionally it is valuable to a new and relatively inexperienced instructor.

The teaching load in freshman English has been drastically modified, and each section involved in the experiment enrolls a maximum of 20 students. Furthermore this has been done not only at no cost to the institution, but also at some saving. Our teaching conditions have been vastly improved, but not at the expense of faculties in other departments.

The teacher of the discussion section has considerable time each semester when he is not required to be in the classroom. We don't consider this a free gift, however. On the contrary, we can now expect that he do what he has always complained he had no time to do. The syllabus is so arranged that when a longer paper comes due in his section, immediately thereafter the students are moved to the auditorium for lectures. As a result the teacher has full working days (instead of nights or weekends) to handle important, difficult assignments. He can, and should also make himself more available now to consult with students; in fact it is now possible for him to take the initiative in th matter, so that the phrase "office hours" is losing some of its connotation. The teacher does not need to rely on the all-too-often trite final written comment that meant

little to him and less to the student.

The student finds himself taken more seriously, because his work is evaluated more thoroughly. This last is of course most important, since it is precisely the one basis on which the freshman English course has its justification as a course required of all college graduates.

There is one other advantage, but it will be mentioned only briefly since it would require development far beyond the scope of this paper. There are indeed many things that can be done through the facilities of television that were impossible or impractical under normal classroom conditions. Television does not need to be a money-saving medium only; it can be of extraordinary significance in improving instructional techniques. Not least valuable has been the experience of working with skilled technicians who were not required to take the course for credit: their candid criticism has been invaluable.

This experiment is not proposed as a final solution but merely as a means to further thinking and self-study. But we do believe that no solution to the problem of freshman English that does not begin with recognizing the needs of both the student and of his teacher, in due relationship to what is financially possible, is worth considering.

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